

# Euro-Mediterranean Relations through the Eyes of Youth and Women

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Despite the challenges young people and women face in their societies, the latest Anna Lindh/Gallup polling exposes optimism to the future. Eleonora Insalaco presents regional analysis from the point of view of these two central groups, highlighting how youth dynamism and intercultural openness are supported by the importance attached to curiosity, independence, and cultural diversity. At the same time, the author tackles the diminishing confidence in traditional institutions to address social problems, in contrast to growing citizen participation.

Statistics can help overcome North-South and East-West divides across the Mediterranean and identify points of convergence and difference between social groups, whether students, women, or people with different kinds of occupation, level of education or religious affiliation, regardless of their geographical origin. Based on new data, and an analysis of emerging trends in the region, we are now in a position to reveal the views of young people and women on the prospects for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, the future of its people and societies.

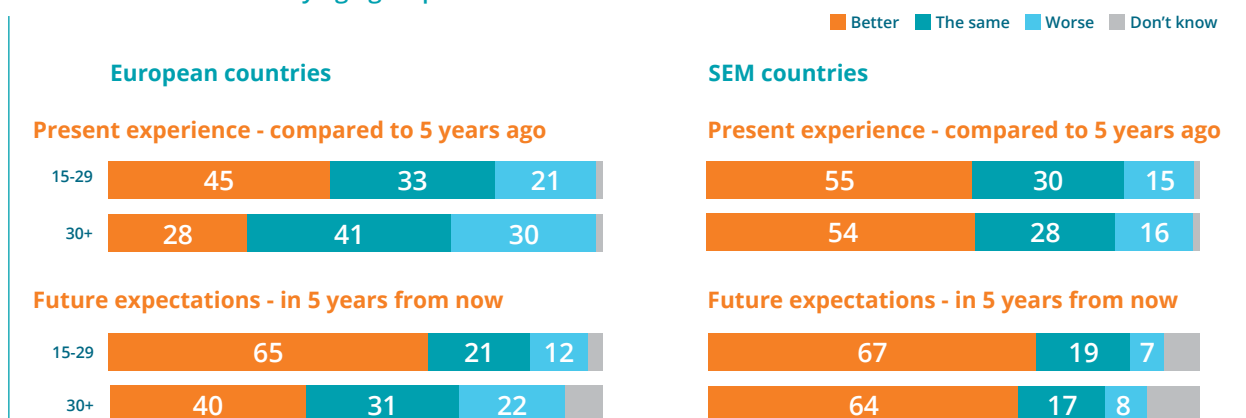
## Sharp reality and positive outlook

Looking at the place that women and youth occupy in the professional and political sectors can help us setting the context of our analysis: on the southern shore of the Mediterranean female participation in the labour force, in 2011, was 20% while male was 72% (World Bank, 2012) and 46% in Europe in 2009 (UNECE, 2012), in Europe the salary gap between men and women for the same type of job is 17%, and 28% in the Middle East and North Africa, in Europe only 30% of women are in managerial

positions while in Arab countries women have only recently begun to join the ranks of managers (Jmaali, Sidani, and Safieddine, 2005), and in 2012 only 14% of them were member of parliament, in Europe rates of women in politics are not much higher with only 23% of women in governments, in 2008, and 23% members of parliament, in 2010. The picture about youth employment is not rosier since, in 2012, the rate of unemployment was 27% in the Middle East and North Africa and of 21% in Europe (ILO, 2012) and because of the economic crisis between 2008 and 2011 the increase of youth unemployment in Europe jumped of 26% compared to the adult unemployment increase of 4%. The crisis also led to the increase of temporary and non-standard jobs and the dependence of youth on their families.

Despite this reality, when looking closer at the opinion of young people and women expressed when interviewed for the Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll a more positive image takes shape. In fact, in 2012, a majority of young people and women consider that their personal life situation is either the same or has improved compared

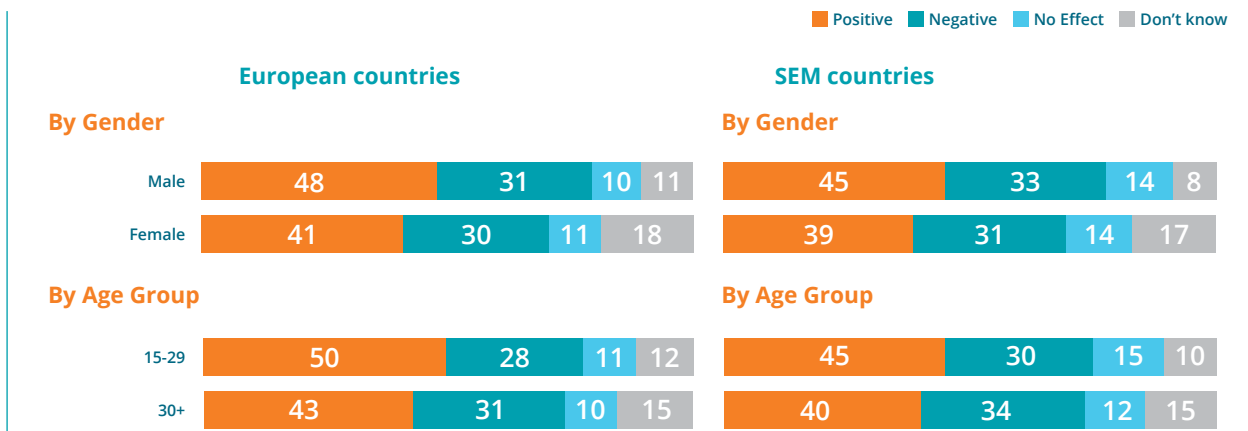
**Chart 9.1**  
Personal life evaluation by age group



**Survey Question:** Taking everything into consideration, what would you say, compared to 5 years ago your present life situation, is ? And how do you expect it will change in 5 years? **Base:** % all respondents, % by socio-demographics (© Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll 2012).

**Chart 9.2**

**Ultimate effect of the Arab Spring on the Euro-Arab relations by gender and age group**



**Survey Question:** Most of the Arab countries are experiencing significant changes started with social movements which have been called an 'Arab Spring'. What do you think, will be the ultimate effects of these changes on the relations between Europe and the Arab countries? Will these changes be: Positive, Negative, or with No effect? **Base:** % of all respondents, % by socio-demographics (© Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll 2012).

to the previous 5 years and are even more optimistic when looking at the future, since around 65% of youth, both in Europe and in Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries (SEM), and 66% of women in SEM countries believe their life will improve in the coming 5 years, only European women show a higher degree of scepticism with only 47% expecting an improvement of the situation and 17% even foreseeing a worse scenario. A majority of women and youth also assess that women's role in society has already improved compared to the last years. This corresponds to the view of 54% of women in Europe and 66% in SEM countries, 57% of young Europeans and 66% of young people in SEM countries (reference to Chart 9.1).

The more positive view expressed by people in SEM rather than their European counterparts might be the outcome of the window of opportunities people felt since the beginning of 2011 with either the fall of long established political regimes or the beginning of constitutional revisions while Europe is living through a tough economic crisis.

Both women and young people reckon that relations between Europe and Arab countries will improve as a result of the so called Arab Spring such a positive outlook especially from the European side might originate from the new image which is spreading in the western world about Arab populations. 50% of youth and 41% of women in Europe and 45% of youth and 39% of women in SEM countries share this view, against and an average of 30% in both groups of respondents who think there will be negative consequences (Chart 9.2).

On the southern shore of the Mediterranean, people, young people, women since the beginning of 2011 went to the streets and called for freedom, respect for their dignity, better economic conditions for themselves and

their children, and a fair political, judicial and social system. These social movements corresponded in time and typology to what was happening in Europe and other western countries and contributed to the understanding that people living on the two shores of the Mediterranean have much more in common than what distinguishes them. The strength of these movements managed to put in question the stereotyped image about Arab population which had been built up since September 2001 and the "War on Terror" and which homogenised people as diverse as Moroccans and Egyptian, Tunisian and Lebanese, doctors and engineers, women and men, youth workers and pensioners into one big block "A threat to be careful about". Of course this statement constitutes also a generalisation of Western and European thinking but tries to expose a perception which has been quite wide spread and which the Arab uprisings have managed to shake.

**Social movements on the rise**

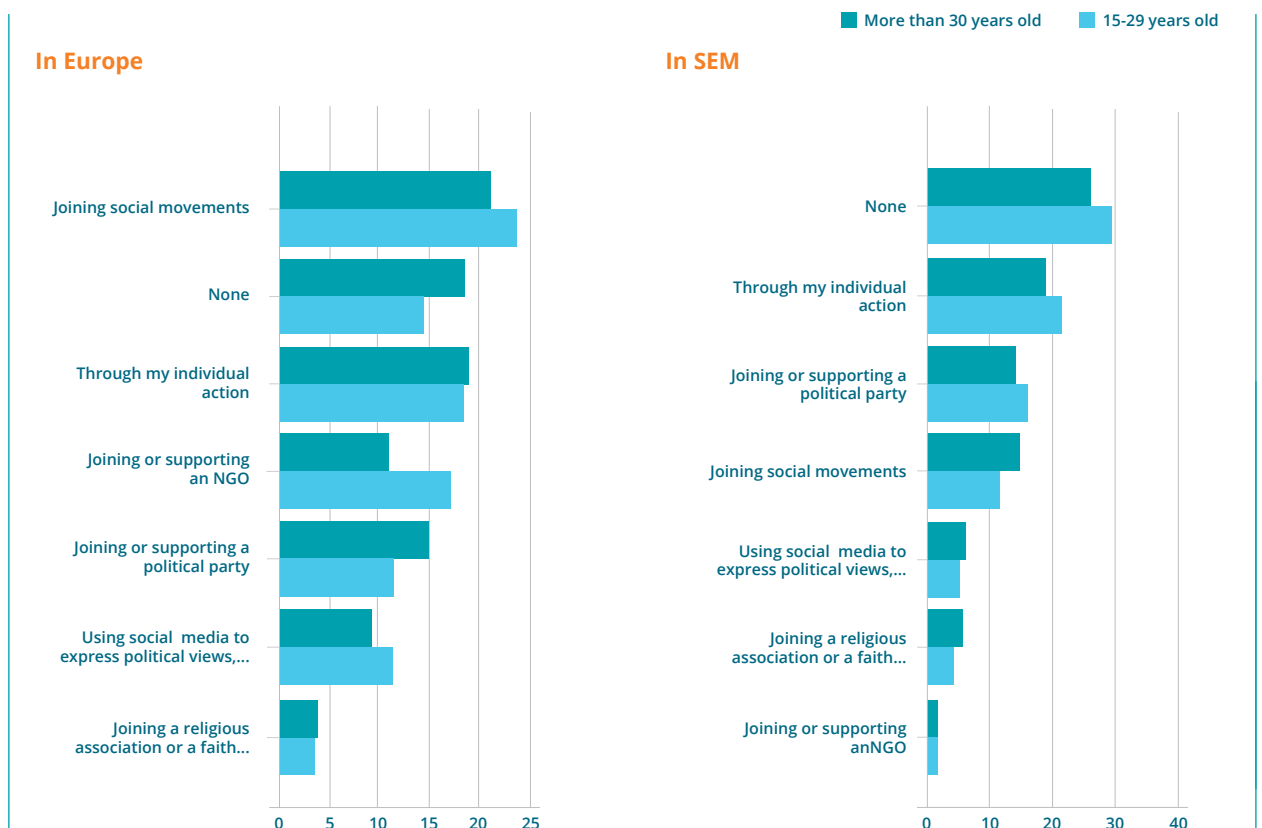
Women and students participating in the demonstrations have acquired more self-confidence and exercised a right of expression and social participation probably never experienced before and which will be a driving force for change within Arab and European societies. This might explain why on both shores of the Mediterranean women and young men show a certain level of disillusionment with the traditional ways of doing politics and a low level of trust in political parties as vehicles of social expression and development. They appear to trust first and foremost themselves and their individual action as a basis for positive social change: this is a belief for 21.4% of youth and around 18% of women in SEM countries (percentages raise for Arab youth to 30% when we do not include Turkey among SEM) and 17% in Europe, compared to 14% of youth and 16% of women

in SEM countries relying on traditional political parties and around 10% in Europe (Chart 9.3).

Besides their individual commitment to make their society a better place to live, young people and women confer their trust to emerging forms of participation such as social movements (for 12% of women and youth in SEM countries and 21% of youth and women in Europe) and NGOs (for 2% of women and youth in SEM countries and 10% of women and 16% of youth in Europe), and social media (for 6% of women and youth in SEM countries and 9% of women and 10% youth in Europe), (Chart 9.3). On the last point related to social media, it is worth mentioning however that in SEM countries it is higher the percentage of adults compared to young people who consider this a useful tool to bring about social improvement: a possible explanation could be found in the high use youth, especially in the Arab countries, made of facebook, twitter and mobile applications, to mobilise people in the 2011 and 2012 demonstrations, and as a source of mutual information, and that they became aware of its limitations and of the need to explore new ways of organisations to impact in the long term change of their societies.

Differences, however, can be noted at the country level with 18% of young Tunisians and 19% of young Jordanian considering this as a good trigger for social action and only 5% of young Egyptians agreeing. Also interesting comparisons could be made in relation to the belief in party politics that is the first form of participation for young Turks (32.2%) and quite high also among Danes (26.9%) who however rate very important also their individual action (34.8% of Danes compared to 0.6 % of Turks registering the lowest rate among SEM). Young Polish are those who believe the most in NGOs as vectors for social change together with Spanish (30.4%), Irish (27.3%) and Germans (26.1%) while 15% of Tunisians, 16% of Moroccans, 11% of Jordanians attach more importance to the adherence to new social movements. According to recent studies (European Social Survey 2006, Eurobarometer 2007, Eurostat Report 2009) about young Europeans' social engagement, political parties are a way of social participation for a very small number of people as compared to recreational groups or organisations, churches, religious associations and NGOs. Young Europeans also show a low level of interest in politics and little trust in political parties and politicians even though the level of trust has risen towards their national parliament and international institutions.

**Chart 9.3** Most efficient ways to contribute to solving problems by age group



**Survey Question:** How do you think you could most efficiently contribute to solving the problems in your country? Base: % of all respondents by age group. Chart compiled by E. Insalaco using data from Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll (© Insalaco, Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll 2012).

It is worth noting at the European level also the relatively low level of trust of women in traditional party politics (11%) and the higher belief in the potential of social movements (21%). This may be due to the relatively low number of women in politics and the bigger space of action women are now finding through non-traditionally-structured social action.

### Curiosity and openness to diversity as a basis for future cooperation

The Euro-Mediterranean value map emerging from the Poll as well as the level of mutual interest among people from the two shores of the Mediterranean constitute a strong social basis for future cooperation around the region.

Besides the central importance recognised to the family (especially for 54.6% of women in SEM countries and 60.8% in Europe), young people and women identify respect for other cultures as the second most important value for Europeans and third for SEM. What is interesting to remark is that respect for other cultures has a slightly lower importance for European youth compared to adults and the other way round for SEM youth. This could reflect the fact that diversity is a reality in the lives of European youth who experience it since their early school stages and through the new technologies while older generations having fewer opportunities for intercultural encounter consider it an aspiration-driven value. On the other hand, SEM younger generations could be motivated by their awareness of the diversity in the region and within their societies and wish to see more social integration (86%). This view is consolidated by their largely positive response to the guarantee of equal rights to minority groups within society and the awareness that diversity is a source of prosperity for their society (86%); however, 48% of youth from SEM countries and 45% of European youth also consider that diversity might have a negative impact on the stability of society. The highest level of youth skepticism was registered in Germany 59%, Ireland 50% and Poland 48% Turkey 71%, Morocco 52%.

Youth dynamism and openness also emerges from the value they put on curiosity and independence and the high level of interest they have in news and information about countries on the other shore of the Mediterranean. Young Europeans expressed a major interest in the cultural life and lifestyle of SEM countries (84% in 2012 compared to 75% in 2009). This data is further supported by other studies (Eurostat, 2009) underlining young Europeans' inclination to engage with foreign cultures mainly through foreign cuisine, reading foreign-language newspapers or books, watching foreign television or movies, making friends and travelling. Younger people in SEM countries show a higher relative interest than adults

in all aspects of life in Europe ranging from its economy (70% in 2012 - 63,2% in 2009), to the political life (68,5% of youth), to culture (68% in 2012 - 62% in 2009) to religion (52,4% in 2012 - 47% in 2009).

Women emerge a bit more introverted since in comparison to men they show less cross cultural interest; however, their overall level of interest has increased between 2009 and 2012 (of 4% for SEM women towards European culture, 5% for religious trends and of 9% about the economy; while European women's interest in SEM cultural life and lifestyle has increased of 6%) . Compared to youth and men women are also less exposed to intercultural exchanges and this may expose an inverted correlation between these two dimensions.

The analysis reveals two social groups socially committed, optimistic about the future but pragmatic in their approach since they maintain a level of realism when assessing the challenges ahead and the current systems in place.

A final wake-up bell is addressed to the international and national communities because despite the relatively important numbers of individuals believing in the potential of social action a strident minority (~20%) thinks that there is nothing which could be done to improve their society neither at the institutional nor at the individual level and a majority shows an important lack of knowledge of others' priorities.

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